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Inventing Nature in "Big Two-Hearted River"

Marie-Christine Agosto

1 Philosopher Clément Rosset has written that "the idea of nature is one of the major screens that isolate man from the real, by substituting the complication of an ordered world to the chaotic simplicity of existence" (Rosset 5, translation mine). He has defined nature as a "frame," a "perennial stance," a "presence," aimed at comforting man from being "fragile and insignificant." His definition finds an echo in the American conception of nature, as American thinkers have always tended to see nature not as a man-centered concept but as a gauge of man's predicament and capacities. Because it was not shaped by history and could only rest on a geographical and tangible reality to derive its own characteristics from, American culture has developed a strong nature bias. Art and literature have grown from such dynamics as is to be found in nature. It started with the early English-modeled Gothic atmosphere nature was invested with, venting anxiety. It evolved into a political and sacred view of nature in the 19th century that founded the national consciousness, nurtured a sense of belonging and ensured the birth of an autonomous literature. The idea of nature in American literature has thus evolved from a dangerous wilderness to be repressed to an optimistic version of a rich and promising nature, and in the late 19th century a justification in nature of the competitive forces of social Darwinism.

2 At the turn of the century, the first world conflict dramatically opened the frontiers and caused a shift in man's relationship to nature and in human relationships altogether. Doubt and questioning shaped the modernistic experience and subjectivity of perception came as a response to the sense that the world and outside reality were losing stability and coherence. In that context, Hemingway was one of the first American authors to "internationalize" his representations of nature. His fiction travels through various lands, in a nomadic approach to nature, taking vistas on the rivers, the lakes and the forests of Michigan, the green hills of Africa, the snowy mountain tops of Kilimanjaro and the Alps, the Mediterranean landscapes of Italy and Spain. Hemingway's nature is "deterritorialized" and cannot be encompassed within a politically determined sphere.[1] If

there is anything to conquer, then, it is no longer a mythical and national territory but a human territory. Besides, departing from the romantic sense of the divine, Hemingway's nature is humanly accessible and is given a universal purport. His objective is to define man through a direct contact with reality in a world that is both strange and homely.

3 In "Big Two-Hearted River," one of the best known of Hemingway's early short stories, nature is given a prominent role. The text is a twofold account of Nick Adams's solitary fishing trip on the Fox River – the actual name of the river flowing by Seney and which Hemingway changed "purposely," as he puts it in "The Art of the Short Story," "not from ignorance or carelessness but because Big Two-Hearted River is poetry" (Oldsey 218). The subject matter of the story easily lends itself to being interpreted as a quest of the vital and regenerative forces of nature. Yet the treatment of the subject has given way to various critical approaches. My analysis will come as one more among the many interpretive layers that have been piling up one upon the other in a thorough exegesis of the text, and will focus first on the idea that nature entices one to a *tabula rasa*. It is a *sine quanon* for a true relation of man to nature (and his own nature), which will open up to a physical experience and the apprehension of nature as a measure of time. In "Big Two-Hearted River," inventing nature is not just imagining it, i.e. conjuring up images, but inhabiting it in a process of self-construction and self-knowledge.

A tabula rasa

4 The contemporary reading of "Big Two-Hearted River" is loaded with the interpretations expanding on the Lost Generation themes that prevailed from the 1930s through the 1950s.[2] The linearity of the text and its non-eventful dimension – at least for non-fishermen – have both led the critics to find its meaning beyond or below the surface. A story in which hardly anything occurs is likely to raise as many or even more questions than a highly dramatic story. Drawing on the theory of the iceberg stated by Hemingway and according to which seven-eighths of the literary text lie beneath the surface, the critics have stressed the submerged tensions, a feeling of ill-being and oppressive shadows, and have related them to the war trauma. They have made "Big Two-Hearted River" a reflection of a "man with a divided heart" (Lynn 102). To give but a few examples of such critical stances, Philip Young underlines the "monotonous" rhythm of the narrative and considers it the product of a "sick" mind (Young 47). Malcolm Cowley refers to the story as a "walking dream" in a "nightmarish" context (Cowley viii). In his recent comparative analysis of "Big Two-Hearted River" and Jim Harrison's *True North*, Terry Engel defends the thesis of the "spiritual healing" of World War I veteran Nick Adams, thus following Cowley's interpretation that Hemingway's images are "symbols of an inner world" and Sheridan Baker's interpretation of the devastated landscape symbolizing Nick Adams's internal scars (Engel 18). Such readings were corroborated by Hemingway's late assertions in his 1948 letters to Cowley and to *The New York Times*, at a time when he probably needed a heroic status: " 'Big Two-Hearted River' is a story about a boy who has come back from the war. The war is never mentioned though. This may be one of the things that help it" (Lynn 108). Further mention of the deliberate omission of the war is to be found in "The Art of the Short Story," an unpublished piece dated June 1959 in which Hemingway disclosed some of his theories about the writing of fiction (Oldsey 218). This is precisely where the problem lies. The idea of death is kept in check and the text is teeming with signs of life and living elements, taken from the animal and

vegetal realms: insects, birds, fish, mammals – and a number of tree species and plants. Besides, explicit references to the war being nowhere to be found and no access to the character's consciousness being granted as a result of Hemingway's deliberately non-subjective stance, a void is created in the text, which leaves free room for biographical and symbolic interpretations. On the one hand, such interpretations mostly rest on the burnt-over country the story opens on and that Nick discovers when getting off the train at Seney, and they analyze it as an image of a "shattering experience," a "physical and psychic conflagration" entailing the character's "total disorientation" (DeFalco 147). Nature, then, embodied in the "grasshopper turned black from living in the burned-over land," would lay bare the stigmata of history. On the other hand, such readings take it for granted that Nick might be Hemingway's autobiographical projection or an alter ego, and they refer the text to the author's excursion to Seney in 1919.[3] An alternative interpretation associates the implicit trauma lying at the core of the story to the one that is expressed in "Now I Lay Me" (126). In the latter, the narrator suffers from insomnia and has a flashback taking him to a childhood episode when he saw his mother burn the personal belongings of his father. In those analyses, nature is endowed with symbolic, psychologically relevant and emotional connotations, in a psychoanalytical reading that makes up for the silence of the character and the reader's difficulty to explore his consciousness. Most of those critics hold nature as an objective correlative or a metaphor allowing indirect access to the character's subjectivity.

5 I will personally venture to say that if human history is inscribed in nature, it is rather to be found in the image of the railroad cutting through the land. The train is a recurrent motif in the stories of Nick Adams, to be traced back to Thoreau and related to Anderson who associated it with violent death and with the destructive advance of civilization.[4] "The train" is the opening word of Hemingway's story, echoed by "the swamp" (of which more later) in the last line. As a sign of industrialization, domestication and territorial conquest, it stands for the triumph of history over nature, represents a cultural wound, and plays the role of the mythical stream as a dividing line between two spheres: the urban sphere with the difficult social and personal relationships and the consequent divisions, and the sphere of nature where man is confronted to his own self. In this respect, "Big Two-Hearted River" is opposed to "Hills like White Elephants" where the dialogue between the male and the female characters takes place on the platform of the station – certainly not an urban decor as such, but the nucleus of an urban sphere or a link with urbanization – whereas beyond the rail only hills are to be seen, "like white elephants," thus turning the natural landscape into a stylistic device, a far away and impossible dream. In the 20th century, nature and urbanization have definitely become interdependent themes. In "Big Two-Hearted River" urban centres have literally disappeared: "The thirteen saloons that had once lined the street of Seney had not left a trace," and only a "chipped stone [...] split by the fire [...] stuck up above the ground" where the former Mansion House hotel had been (159).

6 A *tabula rasa* on a ground made clear of the past and history is a necessary step leading to the process of confrontation with the elements of nature: water and the earth. The fire – in its residual cinders, perhaps a persistence of matter – might be viewed positively rather than negatively, hinting at purification and renewal rather than destruction and nothingness, or at least bringing along the hope of and belief in a possible rebirth: "Seney was burned, the country was burned over and changed, but it did not matter. It could not all be burned. He knew that" (161). What is to be recaptured then is a reality on which to

build oneself, whatever the reason for this *bildung*, be it the war or a personal crisis. This gives scope and meaning to the invention of nature. The river, flowing on a precise and geographically identified spot, is this reality. The *bildung* process is contemplated from a distance (a span of five years separates the writing from the experience that fleshed out the story), and from an outside narrative standpoint, a strategy which contributes to its deliberate precision and accounts for the slow rhythm of the narration, attentive not to be distracted by the character's feelings. The narrative method is a complex one, combining memory striving for accuracy and the artifice inherent in the artistic gesture of re-creation.[5] Inventing nature also fuels the experience of the character as he discovers life in nature and reaches a limit beyond which reality suddenly makes sense. That is why the river is much more than a symbol, "a terrain of the imagination" (Gibb 257) or "a landscape of the mind" (Adair 260). It makes it manifest that there is something perennial in nature. The simple, straightforward and assertive sentence "The river was there," in the second paragraph, clearly expresses what meets the eye: the river is a token of permanence. It gives sense, literally, as it serves as a guideline through the text and in the marred land surrounding the character, where he might have felt a stranger. The sense of space is suggested by the repetition of the words "burnt," "burned," "burnt-over," "burned off," occurring eleven times in the first three pages of the short story. Indeed, one cannot speak of the disorientation of Nick who never loses his bearings. The scientific and cultural measurement of space and time is taken over by nature, the position of the sun and the stream of water: "Nick kept his direction by the sun" (162). "He did not need to get his map out. He knew where he was going from the position of the river" (161).

Nature as a structural force

7 Standing on the bridge, as on the threshold of initiation, Nick spends a long time observing the spurts of the trout in the current through the mist of gravel and sand. The prismatic diffractions of light caused by the kingfisher flying up the stream and the fish shooting through the surface then back into the water, and the intermittent reflections of their shadows, are briefly responsible for a suspension of time and a cubist fragmentation of the real. The "glassy convex surface of the pool" is like a looking glass inviting Nick to go through, but he remains poised between the fantastic and imaginary sweep and a methodical and patient penetration of the real. Thus distorted shapes underwater do not appear as an anamorphosis of the real but as an effort of accommodation of the eye. The same phenomenon is repeated twice, when Nick stares at the far blue hills of the Lake Superior height of land (161) and again when, lying on his back, he looks up at the sky through the branches of the pine trees and has to shut and open his eyes so that the hills do not disappear (163).

8 Nick's initiation in nature does not lead him to revelation but to adjustment. There is no symbolic projection in Hemingway's text though it may convey symbols and archetypes. His vision does not aim at transforming or going beyond the real and does not try to substitute a disembodied world of ideas for the concrete world of the *here and now*. His distrust of abstraction and symbolism, which he kept insisting upon even after the publication of *The Old Man and the Sea* (albeit the highly symbolic import of this novel), stems from a thrust to see the world as it is. It is the vision of a pragmatist who is not tempted to look behind or beyond to uncover what nature might reflect. Hemingway's world is not one of transcendence: it is rooted in immanence. In "Big Two-Hearted River,"

the gaze guides the character to the awareness of what is and the narrator to the memory of what has been, not to the imagination of what might be. By nature, a metaphoric fiction relies on images building up a reality for the reader, but Hemingway's fictional reality is a capture of the real and not an imaginary denial of it or strategy of evasion. One can refer to Rosset's study of memory and imagination, both termed by him "surrogates for perception" or "semi-perceptive faculties." The difference, he says, is that memory appears as a form of "knowledge of the real," endowed with a cognitive dimension that accounts for its relative infallibility (notwithstanding occasional failures), as opposed to the "indeterminacy inherent in imagination." That is why memory is able to re-present the past and re-actualize what has been, whereas imagination works as a purveyor of free images, emancipated from the real (Rosset 88-93, translation mine). The process of representation and re-actualization thus defined by Rosset informs Hemingway's narrative strategy, intent on both technical and documentary precision – when it comes to facts and gestures – and an acuteness of sensations, transferred to the character of fiction. The consequence is that the relation to nature never takes the fiction into the realm of the virtual: hardly any metaphor or comparison is used, thus avoiding the risk of de-centering a discourse that remains matter-of-fact and favors the basic sentence pattern. There is no slipping out of the actual: the stress is on action, not on contemplation. It is not given a phantasmagorical quality either: no escape into dream is allowed when Nick takes a nap in the pine island or during his night sleep between part I and part II of the short story.

9 To the terms fusion and communion that might come to mind when describing Nick's relation to nature, both words being reminiscent of Whitman's pantheistic mysticism and cosmic exaltation of American space, one will prefer communication or circulation. To the religiously connoted idea of "ritualistic gestures" or "ritualized activity," alluding to his camp site installation and fishing practice in Carlos Baker's view of "fishing as a ritual of exorcism and therapy" (Baker, 1972, 126), one will rather oppose the idea of a series of carefully thought about and methodically carried out actions, with full awareness of the goal to be reached. Nick's patient walking up the stream to strike the right stretch of the river, the laying out of his camp, the cooking of his meal, the securing of his equipment, the catching of hoppers for bait, all contribute to the utmost documentary precision mentioned above. The precision is taken to a professional extreme in the second part of the short story where fishing tackle and tactics are described: fixing the reel, threading the line, tying the leader, baiting the hook, casting and tightening the line, lifting the trout over the bank and cleaning "him" thoroughly in the end by the riverside, not to mention the thrill, excitement and disappointment when feeling the tug on the line or fighting the trout against the current. The realism of this detailed account of the fishing party perfectly meets the documentary needs of specialized angling anthologies. The unexpected use of the modifier in "Nick felt [...] *professionally* happy" (171, italics mine) testifies, without irony, to the seriousness of the whole affair. It does not preclude a poetic vision – apt and brilliant – of epiphanies in nature, as when the trout rising to insects are "making circles all down the surface of the water as though it were starting to rain" (164).

10 The nature in "Big Two-Hearted River" is not just a setting or a background ornament. Its description does not fill in blanks and pauses in the narrative. It is not a given landscape but one that is being built from the character's experience and simultaneously with it, as shown by the echoes and parallels in rhythm and vocabulary: "The road ran on [...]. Nick

went on up. Finally the road, after going parallel to the burnt hillside, reached the top. [...] Ahead of him, as far as he could see, was the pine plain" (161). The landscape is drawn as the character moves along, in a dynamic description in which nature is endowed with a structural function. Yet, the outlining of the landscape appears close to topographical mapping. It is articulated on horizontal lines (the railroad, the road, the river and the horizon), vertical lines (the pine tree trunks) and oblique lines (the bridge, the uprooted elm trees and branches across the river). The dynamism of the character's walking through nature sets forth and discloses a landscape that comes alive in its paradoxical balance. In other words, the reader is made to perceive a geometrical ordering of space instead of just feeling a subjective atmosphere and vague impressions. Like Cézanne, whom he highly regarded,[6] Hemingway causes nature to take shape and form. Parallel and perpendicular lines suggest volume and fullness, rising up and sloping down, relief, depth – a construction of space that is rhetorically brought to life through parataxis, repetition, chiasmus and the use of deictic words indicating direction and movement ("down," "up," "round," "on," "ahead"). To quote James Plath and Meyly Chin Hagemann, among other scholars who focused on Hemingway's debt to Cézanne's art, the device consists in "reduc[ing] art forms into geometric planes that create tensions when placed at angles with one another [...]; contain[ing] the tension by using overlapping dynamic and static plans; and omitt[ing] distracting details that invite literary translation so that spatial forms remain pure" (Hagemann 97, quoted by Plath 163). Far from being stripped down, bare and simple, Hemingway's landscape is thus a complicated description resulting from a careful pattern of "visual-to-verbal transformation" (Johnston 28-37).

Nature and the body

11 The structural force of nature propels the text and casts light on a phenomenology of perception. According to Merleau-Ponty (who commented upon Cézanne's work) the body is a "silent guard" and a centre of perspective. In "Big Two-Hearted River," the organization of the whole perceptive field is made possible because Nick is used as a mediator and focalizer, in a narrative that relies not on his reason and thought but on his physical presence, with the sensorial functions acting as a link between man and the outside world. Nick relates to nature through his body. It should not be read as a glorification of a supposed male strength or superiority, but a sign of a possible integration into nature. All the senses are involved in the process: sight, touch, taste, smell, and, to a lesser extent, hearing. The only noises to be heard are the humming of the mosquito in the silent night (168) and Nick's words (he speaks to himself aloud three times, a likely detail even though his voice sounds "strange" in the woods). The silence in which the scene is enclosed brings forth the remembering process and retrospective vision. In the hierarchy of senses, sight and hearing traditionally rank first because they are linked to intellectual and cultural faculties and raise man above his natural instincts. Sight can also be deemed an objective sense as it keeps the beheld object at a distance to make it out and throw it into light, and consequently aims at an elucidation and an ordering of the world. This applies not only to Nick who functions as a focalizer in the story but also to the outside narrator reordering the experience and who seems to contemplate the scene from above, or from a distance granted by time and memory. If there is any beauty in the nature represented in "Big Two-Hearted River," it is the beauty of the literary representation. In other words, the aesthetic and moral value of the scene

pertains to the narrative stance adopted and should be dissociated from the view of the character, whose experience of nature is a pragmatic one, not a contemplative one, and who is in a position to touch and feel it concretely. There is actually nothing like tactile aesthetics, one would rather speak at the utmost of the pleasure of touch.

12 The prevalence of senses is a corollary of Hemingway's anti-intellectual attitude. To quote Merleau-Ponty again: "Perception is neither a beginning science nor an early exercise of intelligence. One must do commerce with the world and be present to the world: this comes prior to intelligence" (*Sens et non-sens*, 105, translation mine). It is highly relevant that Nick's adventure at the river should begin with erasing thought, intellectual faculties and needs, save the basic ones, like hunger, thirst and sleep (161-162), and even erasing memory (167). The result is a foregrounding of primary and genuine emotions and sensations before consciousness can resurface in the second part and "his mind start[s] to work" again (168). Only then can images reappear, because they derive from an oblique approach to the real. For example, in the second part when Nick is preparing breakfast, the buckwheat batter spreading on the skillet is compared to lava (170). The comparison resorts to a natural phenomenon but the image produced is borrowed from a distant nature making it obvious that the imagination always tends to slide onto a distant stage.

13 Non-verbal communication is thrown into relief by Nick's body reactions. They fill in his silence: his muscles are aching from the heavy pack (in which a hollow from his back is moulded), his shoulders are painful, his arms and legs are stiff and cramped when he wakes up (160, 161, 163). Touch, taste and smell are the senses that relate him with his milieu: he feels the earth on his neck and back (163), he feels the ankle-high sweet fern (162) and, in a synaesthesic combination pointing at the unity of perception, the brown and soft needle floor underfoot (163). He feels his hands wet with dew (169), the cold shock of the water and the current sucking against his leg (171), the gravel sliding under his shoes (171). He is even shown "wriggling his toes in the water in his shoes" (175). His immersion into the vegetal and water elements is not necessarily reminiscent of a "baptismal rite" (DeFalco 150), but is significant of a direct intercourse with the natural elements and a coming to terms with their physical properties: hardness, softness, resistance, temperature. It takes part in the cognitive process. The two examples that follow show how language expresses the continuity between Nick and the outside world: "It was getting hot, the sun hot on the back of his neck" (176). "His shoes felt the gravel. [...] The gravel slid under his shoes" (171). In the first quotation, the description of the physical sensation repeats the information first given impersonally, and it introduces subjectivity. The second quotation deals with one and the same fact, but the perspective shifts from the man to nature. In both instances, Hemingway re-establishes a cause and effect relationship, making up for a cumulative syntax which favors the sequential over the consequential ordering of words and gets rid of the obvious chain of causality articulated by complex sentences.

14 What can be drawn from this is that the character's simplicity of experience is paradoxically not matched by the simplicity of expression. Minimalism is a language artifice. Juxtaposition of assertive clauses and the crisscross pattern created by repetition of words and echoes put into perspective the life force flowing through all things in nature, outside any act of will. This is what Nick and the reader are both meant to feel. Nick inhabits the world and he "inhabits his body" – to quote from Thoreau. Knowledge is also brought to him through taste and smell, like the smell of the sprigs of crushed heathery sweet fern (162, 164), the smell of the canvas (165), or the smell of the hot beans

and spaghetti (166). His combined reaction to smell and temperature anticipates his reaction to taste: he reacts to the bitterness of the coffee or to the sweetness of the juice syrup of the apricots (167, 168). Such details about his camp site or his food are not superfluous or incongruous with the subject. They underline how the contact with the reality of nature induces *heimlichkeit,* a homely feeling: "Already there was something mysterious and homelike. [...] He was in his home where he had made it" (165). Contrary to the romantic sweep toward the sublime in nature that takes man away from the familiar, everything in Hemingway's story, including the fishing activity itself, pertains to a down-to-earth experience opened on self-knowledge and the knowledge of the world. In Merleau-Ponty's words: "Feeling is a vital intercourse with the world: it makes it present and homely" (*Phénoménologie*, 64-65, translation mine).

Nature as a measure of time

15 Hemingway's character is involved in "a vital intercourse" with the elements of nature. To some extent, and quite paradoxically, one may borrow the words used by Deleuze to discuss Whitman's relation to nature – not in the cosmic poems of *Leaves of Grass,* but in the fragmented prose of *Specimen Days*. Dealing with "The Oaks and I," Deleuze underlines how Whitman and nature "wrestle together." Whitman is involved in an "athletic intercourse with the trees: it is no fusion or confusion, but an exchange. They go hand in hand" (Deleuze 79). Except for the benefit of virtue to be drawn from nature (as "the sap and sinew rising through [the poet], like mercury to heat" shows), Nick's relation to nature is of the same kind. His practice of the trout fishing sport is certainly physical,[7] all the more so as the use of grasshopper for bait instead of artificial fly implies a hand contact. Nevertheless, there is no real "exchange" or "interchange" as in Whitman's nature where, to quote Deleuze: "The notions of fellowship and conviviality [...] grow from a network of living relations between heterogeneous living units" (Deleuze 79). Fellowship is certainly not customary in Hemingway's representation of nature. His fiction integrates an idea of conflict inherent to the law of nature. Yet the story is not a stage of rugged competition or a display of violence, but conveys the acceptation of the law of nature as exhibited in the food chain suggested by the kingfisher watching his prey and the minks feeding on the trout offal – a law of nature which is dramatized in a more tragic way in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Besides, a necessary respect for the balance of nature is intimated when Nick does not keep the small trout and is careful to wet his hand so as not to disturb the protective mucus (173). Hemingway's concern is undoubtedly not with the environmental defense but with the truth of existence whose recognition may confer a form of wisdom.

16 In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago is one element in the vast chain of living species. His fate is linked to that of the marlin pursued by the sharks. He even calls him "my brother." They are literally in the same boat. In *The Old Man and the Sea* a limit has been transgressed which hastens the tragedy. Like Santiago, Nick accepts the hostility of the world but he avoids the swamp. His choice of fishing downstream highlights his determination to face the dangerous current, holes, and obstacles, until he gets to the critical curve, beyond the boulders, where the river becomes marly and where moving is hampered with tree roots and green weed fronds swinging in the current. The swamp feeds the biggest trout, an anticipation of the so long-expected marlin, himself a degraded version of the mythical sea monster. Yet, if the swamp gives life, it is also a

place of death and sinking into layers of deposit, where trout feed and grow on vegetable and animal remains, a terrifying tangle hiding the untamed secret of nature: "In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure" (179). At this point of the story, signs of rigidity and the fixity of death come into contrast with the fluidity of the living elements: "The swamp looked solid [...], the branches solid [...], you could not crash through the branches" (179). Nick's instinctive refusal to fish the swamp originates from a deeply rooted fear of being sucked down, as suggested in the following excerpt: "He felt a reaction against *deep wading into* the water *deepening up* under his armpits" (179, italics mine). Here is the submerged seven-eighths of the iceberg: it is the unsaid, hidden truth, under the surface of the swamp, deep down into the unknown and pointing to the reality of death, underneath.

17 Death is integrated into the representation of nature, partaking in the process of transformation and growth, and in the phenomenon of decomposition and dissolution. Individual human death is put into perspective against a larger background of mineral, vegetal and animal death. Nevertheless, aseptic death (smells do not betray the putrefaction of things) lies beyond the text. It is a future step to take, a third part to be unfolded later, or a new page not yet written, but it is also an inevitable stage hinted at, in a constant development that stands as a modern version of fate: "There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp" (180). The unresolved tension of "Big Two-Hearted River" originates from there. Placed where it originally was, at the end of *In Our Time*, the story provided the collection with an open ending. Yet, as it is, it definitely holds on to the vital impulse, for it is not a work of maturity but of maturation. With its chronological development, its binary rhythm following the walking tempo or the breathing pattern, and modelled on biological and physiological phenomena,[8] it is a vision of a man embodied in temporality. Nature is what he measures time by, a linear and not a cyclical time, for nature in Hemingway's work does not lure anyone with a dream of eternity.

18 As a distant heir to the adamic hero celebrated by 19th century American thinkers, Nick Adams is in quest of *his* truth, if not the transcendental truth, and he is given birth and learns life in nature. Hemingway's nature is embodied in the landscape, the biological milieu, the reality of the surrounding world, inevitably incomplete, personal and fragmentary, for his experience of the river is a fisherman's, not a miller's or a gold seeker's. His nature is concrete, tangible and alive, and demonstrates that "the idea of nature is but an ideological fantasy: it does not belong to the realm of ideas but to the realm of desire" (Rosset 25, 311). As such, it combines a desire of order and a call for sense. In Hemingway's work, from "Big Two-Hearted River" to *The Old Man and the Sea*, nature is always a stumbling stone, a test of endurance and strength, shaping self-knowledge, self-definition and acceptation of existence, and above all the recognition of life's tragic ending. Nick's trout fishing experience is not the story of a solitary escape into nature or a romantic withdrawal into self, but an experience of confrontation and elucidation, in the etymological sense of becoming "lucid", i.e. calm, clear and wise. Rather than an abstract or symbolic initiation, it accounts for a salutary process of integration into nature, which necessitates a close and direct contact and leads to a recognition of human nature and a reconciliation with oneself. As in *Walden*, nature is associated to the human experience, as a positive reference contrasting with the lures of society, and as a guide in man's individual quest. Taken thus, inventing nature does not only imply making it up or/and discovering it, but re-creating it as a regained paradigm.

Above all it implies making it one’s home, in an endeavor to recapture such precious moments as those that were recalled by Thoreau in his *Journal* when he said: “I can remember that I was all alive, and inhabitedmy body with inexpressible satisfaction.”

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NOTES

1. Borrowed from Gilles Deleuze, the ideas of "territory" and "deterritorialisation" are to be understood with reference to ethology rather than politics. "Deterritorialisation" means more than moving away from a geographical space or from an objectively delineated and identifiable territory. It has an existential value and implies moving toward and into a "new land," an area of self-fulfillment and personal involvement.

2. The text was written in the summer of 1924, when Hemingway was in Paris. It appeared in May 1925 in the first issue of Ernest Walsh's literary magazine, *This Quarter*, and in October of the same year in Hemingway's first collection of short stories, *In Our Time.*

3. In September 1919, Hemingway, although he still suffered from a leg injury received the year before at Fossalta di Piave, on the Italian front, had set out with two friends of his (Al Walker and Jack Pentecost) for the last camping and fishing party of the summer. They had gone up to Seney, in the Northern part of the Michigan peninsula, fifteen miles from Lake Superior. Seney actually was the ghost town described by Hemingway. A former station on the railroad built in 1885 between Saint Ignace and Marquette for the transportation of timber, Seney (so called after the name of one of the company's managers, George L. Seney, from New York) had quickly developed into an accommodation centre for lumbermen. But the town had been destroyed by forest fires twice in the period from 1891 to 1895. In 1919, the town was deserted. The river flowing through Seney is the Fox River; the Big Two-Hearted River is a smaller one flowing north and east (Baker, 1969, 86). See also and "History of Seney" (Detroit Free Press, June 18, 1963) 4B.

4. In Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, many characters are killed in train accidents. In Thoreau's *Journal*, the train crystallizes the writer's impatience with his fellowmen's eagerness to take part in the gold rush ("September 28th"). See *Walden* (62).

5. It should be noted that if Hemingway's landscapes have always been inspired by his own experience, he has always described them from a distance in space and time, not only for the benefit of hindsight, but needing the quiet recollection to give sense and meaning to the aesthetic construction. The idea of "photographic realism" with its implication of immediacy, is obviously not adequate (and highly debatable in itself). Yet, memory is not just an act of imagination either, but an act of re-presentation of reality, necessarily subjective and possibly distorted.

6. Hemingway's admiration for Cezanne is explicit in "On Writing." This story, now an autonomous one, was initially intended as a conclusion to "Big Two-Hearted River." Hemingway cut it out before publication: "He knew just how Cezanne would paint this stretch of river. God, if only he were here to do it [...]. Nick, seeing how Cezanne would do the stretch of river and the swamp, stood up and stepped down into the stream" (219).

7. In a paper devoted to the role of Nature in literary modernism and postmodernism, Dana Phillips examines Hemingway's evocations of sport and writes that sport, particularly so-called "blood sport" (bullfighting, big-game hunting, fishing, war), serves Hemingway as a "vehicle for his version of the modernistic project: the affirmation of the self in a transcendent moment of realization in which the dross of culture (language, sexuality, history) is clarified, melting away to reveal the roots of culture in nature, and human nature." His extensive definition of sport, including war, is questionable, but I will certainly agree with his demonstration thatNick Adams's trout fishing aims at a basic transformation possible only through the physical presence of nature, and in nature. In postmodernist literature and experience, Phillips argues, "representation has supplanted presence" and also lacks the contemplative quality of

Hemingway's texts, inherited from "an older bygone tradition of sport fishing (Walton, Thoreau), of which Hemingway now appears as a final avatar" (Phillips 206).

8. In "On Writing," Hemingway presents the creative act not as an act of conscience but as a peristaltic action. Expanding on the physiological image, Chaman Nahal analyses the alternation of action and inactivity, in "Big Two-Hearted River," as a diastolic and systolic pattern, the pulsation of the heart echoing the pulsation of the universe (Nahal 101-108).

ABSTRACTS

The article re-examines one of the best-known and most controversial of Hemingway's short stories, "Big Two-Hearted River," a story that has often been read in the light of the Lost Generation themes, as one step in Nick Adams's education. As an alternative reading, the present analysis focuses on the representation of nature through Nick's perceptive experience, but also through the narrator's and the reader's. Leaving aside the symbolic analysis of nature inherited from 19th century thought, it stresses the importance of the body and senses in the human relation to the non-human world. It shows how nature, taking shape in the landscape, the biological milieu, the surrounding living reality, determines a cognitive process of apprehension and penetration of the real, and enhances a poetics of the homely in a precise, deliberate working out of meaning. Inventing nature thus implies accepting reality – however incomplete and fragmentary – and adjusting to it and to the reality of existence.

L'article ré-examine l'une des plus connues et des plus controversées des nouvelles de Hemingway: "Big Two-Hearted River". Il aborde ce texte non comme une étape dans l'éducation de Nick Adams, lecture trop souvent soumise aux thématiques de la "Génération Perdue", mais s'intéresse à la représentation de la nature, telle qu'elle s'élabore dans l'expérience perceptive du personnage, du narrateur et du lecteur. Récusant les lectures symbolistes qui tendent à faire de "Big Two-Hearted River" une version dégradée d'une vision contemplative héritée du XIXe siècle, il souligne le primat de la corporéité et des sens dans le rapport de l'humain au non-humain. La nature, qu'elle s'incarne dans le paysage, le milieu biologique, la réalité du monde et du vivant, participe du processus d'appréhension et de pénétration du réel et détermine une poétique du familier dans une construction délibérée et précise du sens. Inventer la nature suppose alors l'acceptation d'une réalité, nécessairement partielle et fragmentaire, et l'adaptation à celle-ci autant qu'à la réalité de l'existence.

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